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SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR INR/R/MR, EUR/SE, EUR/PD, NEA/PD, DRL
JCS PASS J-5/CDR S. WRIGHT

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SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
THURSDAY, MARCH 26, 2009

In Today's Papers

Second 'Ergenekon' Indictment Charges 56 Suspects
Media outlets report the second indictment submitted to court Tuesday accuses 56 suspects, including retired force commander generals Sener Eryugur and Hursit Tolon and 10 other suspects, of being the leaders of the alleged 'Ergenekon' gang as well as working to topple the government and subvert the parliament by using violence. If found guilty, the suspects could be sentenced to life in prison.

Tolon and Eryugur are accused of "leading a terrorist group, trying to topple the government, influencing the judiciary, storing weapons, gathering and disclosing state secrets, and illegal collection of information on individuals." Last year, both former generals were detained but later released due to "health reasons." Leftist-nationalist daily Cumhuriyet's Ankara bureau chief Mustafa Balbay is accused of stealing secret information concerning state security, and of attempting to topple an elected government. The court in Istanbul will hold its first hearing for the 56 suspects on July 20, and will decide on the same date whether to combine the second indictment with the ongoing main 'Ergenekon' case, which tries 86 suspects.

Liberal Radikal comments that, for the first time, commanders are being tried in Turkey on charges of attempting to stage a military coup. Four coup attempts -- codenamed Sarikiz, Ayisigi, Yakamoz and Eldiven -- were listed in the second Ergenekon indictment. The indictment accuses former commander generals Ozden Ornek, Aytac Yalman and Ibrahim Firtina of "cooperating with the Ergenekon organization." The prosecutor in charge of the investigation said the former generals would be "tried by civil courts, not by the military court."

Editorial Commentary on the Second 'Ergenekon' Indictment

Ismet Berkan wrote in liberal-intellectual Radikal: "It is important that top ranked retired generals will be tried for charges related to coup plotting this time. It is also important that a civilian

court tries them, and every step should be taken to prevent a military court from trying them instead."

Ali Bayramoglu wrote in Islamist oriented Yeni Safak: "The nature of second indictment in the Ergenekon case reflects a comprehensive approach regarding the future of military-civilian relations. If the government acts with determination against criticism, eventually this relationship can be put onto the right track."

Can Dundar wrote in mainstream Milliyet: "The trial of some high ranking names, including generals, is a good step toward the elimination of coup mongering. However there should also be a long term perspective that focuses on a plan for democratization. Turkey's current structure is good enough to nourish more coup plotters. The remedy to this situation is full democratization, including guarantees for a free press, individual freedoms and the unobstructed representation of all political leanings in the parliament."

BBP Leader Yazicioglu's Helicopter Crashes

All papers and TV channels: A helicopter carrying the chairman of Grand Unity Party (BBP) Muhsin Yazicioglu and five more people, including a Ihlas News Agency (IHA) reporter, from Kahramanmaraş to Yozgat for an election rally, crashed in the mountainous area near Goksun town. Mainstream Hurriyet reports that IHA reporter Ismail Gunes called his agency by his cell phone and said "everybody died except me, I am injured on my feet and loosing blood." Following this conversation, reportedly, the signal died. The wreckage of the helicopter could not be found until now and the rescue teams are still searching for the helicopter wreck. Islamist-oriented Yeni

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Safak reports that Yazicioglu and his wife survived four suspicious traffic accidents in the past two years.

Erdogan Announces the 5th Stimulus Package

Sabah, Milliyet, Radikal, Aksam, Referans, Vatan, Zaman: PM Erdogan announced the fifth economic package to boost the Turkish economy at his election campaign in Cankiri. The package includes cuts in value added tax on furniture, computers, industrial machinery, office goods and real estate, for three months.

Barzani: "Turkey Recognized Kurdistan"

Mainstream Sabah quoted the Regional Kurdish Administration's Prime Minister Necirvan Barzani as saying "President Gul's meeting with me means that Turkey recognizes the "Kurdistan region." Barzani added that they are hoping to improve the relationship with Turkey and so far, very serious developments realized in ties with Turkey. "Just a short while ago, Turkey deployed hundred thousand troops at our border. We reached to a very important point in our relations and I believe that this relationship will be improved", added Barzani.

A Zombie President for the EU (Hurriyet)

Media outlets note that the global economic crisis has toppled yet another European government, and this government just happens to be the Czech Republic, which currently holds the EU presidency. Mainstream Hurriyet reports "The explosive political crisis in Prague has created a crisis also in Brussels. The Lisbon Agreement is again in danger." Mainstream Sabah reports, "The Global Crisis Topples the Czech Government," after Latvia and Iceland suffered the same fate and "the crisis has caused the EU Presidency to suffer." Liberal Radikal comments, "The Government Holding the EU Presidency Has Fallen," which "places the Lisbon process and the U.S. missile shield program at risk." Leftist Taraf writes, "The Czechs Heat Up the EU's Waters." Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak notes, "The EU Is Left Without a President."

Obama Brings The Goods (Zaman)

Media are abuzz about the equipment that has arrived in support of President Obama's visit to Turkey. Mainstream Hurriyet headlines, "The Goods Came Before Obama on 17 Packed Trucks." Mainstream Haberturk reports, "Barack Obama and his team even brought their own drinking water." Mainstream Sabah reports, "Flights will be cancelled for fifteen minutes" surrounding the president's arrival as "four F-16 war planes will usher Air Force One in and special measures will be taken against potential rocket attacks." In "Obama

Migrates," Islamist-oriented Yeni Safak reports, "Ten days prior to Obama's visit, armored cars, equipment and even drinking water is brought in via military cargo planes." Yeni Safak also notes, "Obama will stay at the Sheraton, and his room will have 'an Iranian view,'" i.e. a view of the Iranian embassy.

TV News (CNN Turk)

Domestic

- State Minister Kursad Tuzmen says during the visit of President Abdullah Gul to Baghdad, Turkey submitted to Iraq 20 new projects for cooperation.
- 8,000 policemen will be on duty in Ankara during the municipality elections to be held Sunday.
- Experts predict a recent cut in value added tax (VAT) rate down to 8 percent from 18 percent will boost the sales of computers in Turkey. A Turkish computer company said they expect one million computers to be sold over the next three months in Turkey.
- A senior official of Lipton Tea Company said tea consumption in Turkey increased by 13.6 percent in 2008 in comparison to the previous year. "Despite the ongoing global financial crisis, the tea market in Turkey continues to grow," said the official.

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World

- On Thursday, President Abdullah Gul will meet European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso, King Albert II Foreign Minister Karel De Gucht in Brussels. Gul will also deliver a speech at the 7th European Business Summit.
- Incoming Israeli Prime Minister Netanyahu says his government will be a "partner for peace" with the Palestinians.
- European Court of Human Rights says Turkey violated the European Convention on Human Rights with the imprisonment given to Murat Ulke, a conscientious objector, for having refused to perform compulsory military service.
- Syria's foreign minister says Damascus would be happy to help President Obama implement his plan to pull U.S. troops out of Iraq.

JEFFREY